

SEYCHELLES 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius, monitored religious freedom issues in the Seychelles, where there was no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence. In its engagements with senior government officials, non-resident U.S. embassy representatives regularly discussed the rights of religious groups, including their right to disseminate messages and, in particular, to obtain radio licenses.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 91,000 (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 76 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent is Anglican. Other Christian groups include Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assembly, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hindus, Muslims, and Bahais are present in small numbers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The government recognizes the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist churches, mosques, and the Bahai local spiritual assembly by individual acts of incorporation. Other churches that are not corporate bodies are registered as associations with the Registrar of Associations. In order to receive tax privileges, religious bodies must also register with the Finance Ministry. As the regulating body for both religious and secular associations, the Registrar of Associations recognizes 54 religious associations. A minimum of seven members is required in order to register an association and the process is straightforward.

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A 2006 amendment to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act prohibits political parties and religious groups from obtaining radio licenses. The government provides broadcast time to religious groups on the national radio broadcasting service. The Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation reviews and approves the editorial content of prerecorded messages and prohibits live broadcasts of all religious programming, with the exception of selected services on alternate Sundays.

State schools operate on land leased by the Catholic Church and Catholic instruction is part of the curriculum. Students that do not adhere to the religion reportedly are relegated to the back of the classroom during religious instruction and are not offered any alternative activities during that time.

Government Practices

The government broadcaster reserved the right to edit prerecorded prayer services to fit within required time slots and to ensure “hate speech” was not broadcast. On alternate Sunday mornings, the national radio service permitted the live broadcast of full Catholic masses and Anglican services, lasting up to 90 minutes. The government also allowed Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, and Seventh-day Adventist groups 15-minute, prerecorded prayer broadcasts, as well as additional time for prerecorded Catholic and Anglican prayer broadcasts every two weeks.

The Court of Appeals upheld the amendment prohibiting religious groups from obtaining radio licenses, but the court declared the state had a duty to ensure religious groups had equal access to existing media.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There was general respect in the society for diverse religious affiliations, beliefs, and practices.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius, monitored religious freedom issues in the Seychelles since there was no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence there. Embassy representatives traveled regularly to the country to meet with government officials. They raised the importance of the right of religious groups to disseminate their messages.